SLACkerFrIEND

#3.5

Editor's Note:

This issue of *Slackerfriend, issue #3.5* is a collection of interviews I conducted over a decade ago. To reflect the passage of time, small editorial adjustments were made, without altering the substance or intent of the original interviews.

All interviews in this zine were conducted by Osty Gale and originally published in the local college paper, *The Caper Times* and online on *Alternativenation* between 2013-2016.

These interviews are reprinted here in substantially their original form. Light copy-editing has been undertaken for clarity and tense consistency.

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FEATURES

Merry Prankster Ken Babbs interview - Aug. 2013

Grateful Deads Tom Constanten interview - Nov.2013

NIRVANA's Chad Channing Interview - Nov 2013

Henry Rollins (BLACK FLAG) Interview - Nov 2013

Ian MacKaye (FUGAZI) - Dec. 2013

Dave Lovering (The Pixies) - Dec. 2013

Naoko Yamano (Shonen Knife) interview - Jan 2014

Kim Shattuck (The Muffs) Interview - Jan 2014

Sam Corbett (The Sheepdogs) interview - March 2016

Unpublished Gig review (Gord Downie) - Nov 2016

Interview with Merry Prankster Ken Babbs

Originally published in *Caper Times*, Vol 41, No. 2 - September 16, 2013. Interview conducted via e-mail with Ken Babbs, August 28, 2013.

In the interview he talked about the Vietnam War, The Acid Tests, his writings as well as his life back then, and how it was at the time of original publication.

O.G: Describe your first encounter with Ken Kesey.

K.B: A jaybird was sitting in the branches of an oak tree. The late afternoon sun sent a beam through the tree and lit up the deck on the back of the house. Centered in the light was a singular looking man stood erect; balanced, hands at his side, a slight smile on his lips, balding head a golden dome. His glinting blue eyes drew me to him like a beacon.

O.G: What role did psychedelic drugs play in your life? How did they affect your view of the world?

K.B: A grad school course in mind and consciousness expansion. Able to explore not only the outer world but the inner as well, including all the way down to the DNA in your body. Most important thing is the awareness of how we are all inter-related and how we have to be kind to one another and help each other out.

O.G: Can you recall your fondest memory of first meeting some of the Beats like Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg?

K.B: Yes I can and I am incorporating them in the book I am writing, called Cronies, which is a burlesque, defined as an historical happening embellished with inventions and exaggerations, giving me the freedom of writing not a memoir or fiction but a jazz sort of thing, starting with something recognizable then taking off into improvisational soars of unexplored realms and meandering back to the established tune again. Jack Kerouc, in his book, On The Road, is the inspiration. Met him just once in NYC, same time I met Ginsberg who I got to know quite well over the years.

O.G: How did you meet Neal Cassady?

K.B: I met him on the bus. He was the driver. I was in back, getting thrown around by his driving as he demonstrated how to do a race car four wheel drift, and I yelled at him, "That's all fine and good in a race car but the attributes of a champion bus driver is he is so smooth the passengers don't even know they are driving down a road, they are as comfortable as if they were in their living rooms."

O.G: Can you tell me a little bit about the trip on Furthur?

K.B: Never took a "trip" on Furthur. And it would be a tough chore to tell a little bit about the trip on Further, it was such a grandiose adventure covering so many miles and years and caught on such an alarming number of hours of film and audio tape but one thing I can say is that it was full up, and kept you glued to the moment, no time for musing on other thoughts or things not raging right in front of your eyeballs.

O.G: Tell me about the acid tests.

K.B: We were editing the bus movie at Kesey's house in La Honda in the spring of 1965, showing each week's reel on Saturday nights. Word spread around the Bay Area and so many people showed up that it got out of hand, so we started renting small halls.

By then we were friends with a band called The Warlocks, and they joined us. We called the shows The Acid Test and advertised only with a generic poster that had a blank square for the location. Admission was a dollar, which got you an Acid Test card with a laminated Polaroid photo and your personal info, and with the card you could get into future tests for a dollar. Our only rule, unenforced, was that everyone stay until dawn so no one was running loose in the streets.

We had nothing to do with the acid and didn't know where it came from or who filled the trash cans with Kool-Aid, one labeled acid, the other not-acid. The Merry Band of Pranksters played at one end of the hall and the Warlocks at the other, sometimes at the same time. We showed the bus movie, and later the Warlocks became The Grateful Dead.

O.G: Do you think "On The Road" by Kerouac is as relevant today as it was 40-50 years ago?

K.B: The book is an American classic now. Revolutionary to the core when it came out, not only in the writing style of free form let it flow without thinking mode, but also in the freedom of the road; you aren't stuck in one place but can go, can break new ground. All are still true today but more ingrained in the culture now that so many people have learned the lessons from the book.

O.G: In august of '72, Kesey held an event at his Springfield Creamery and the Grateful Dead performed there. Do you have any fond recollections of that concert or other Grateful Dead (or other bands) that you haven't shared with anyone else?

K.B: That event at the Creamery was attended by over 20,000 people. They were on the roof, on top of the milk vats, sitting on the assembly line where the bottles were filled with milk, there was barely enough room for the Grateful Dead who were crammed onto a tiny stage jutting out from the big open door to the loading dock. The whole thing was filmed and streamed out to a Country Fair parking lot in Veneta way over on the west side, fifteen miles from the Creamery, where scantily clad fans danced and sweltered to a 24-minute Dark Star as the sun descended and the band segued into the song El Paso.

O.G: As an MC for the concert, what were your concerns with it, being an outdoor concert and all?

K.B: That there would be enough water for all for it was a record setting hot day of 105 degrees but never fear the water truck was near, although quickly emptied, so the quick thinking entrepreneurs hustled up a hot air balloon that hovered over the nearby slough and dipped a huge bucket into the water and sailed back to dump the load on the crowd. Fortunately averted at the last minute by yours truly himself who got the word over the radio and forwarded it to the balloon pilot, that the slough is where the effluent and waste from the porta-potties is dumped; a Hail Mary save, otherwise we would have gone down in history as the only concert ever held where everyone was covered with shit falling from the sky.

O.G: Do you think Americans want and could fight the next war with the same fire and fervency as they did in World War 2 or Afghanistan?

K.B: Get out of here. No comparison between WW II and Afghanistan. One was necessary the other is totally a waste. Nothing was learned from the Vietnam debacle. Generals and munitions and armament and other war manufacturers always want wars and it is the job of the civilian masters to tamp it down.

O.G: What inspired you and Kesey to write "Last Go Round"?

K.B: We had wanted to do a movie that takes place at the Pendleton Round Up for a long time, even went there and took pictures and made tape recordings. Kesey wrote a screenplay and a gal in Pendleton said she could get a movie made of it but that didn't happen so I said to Kesey "Why don't we turn it into a novel and when that comes out see if Hollywood wants to make a movie of it?"

O.G: Do you have a specific writing style?

K.B: Sit down at typewriter, or computer, and pound away. Also when inspiration strikes when the computer is off, I pick up a pen and paper and write it out longhand. The secret is to write whether you want to or not. Be confident.

O.G: Did you or Kesey come up with the title?

K.B: Neither of us did. Came from the 1911 Round Up in which the bucking bronco title ended as a tie between three cowboys and they had to have a last go round to pick the winner.

O.G: Is there a message in your novel "Who Shot the Water Buffalo" that you want readers to grasp?

K.B: It was obvious right from the get-go, in 1962 and 1953 when the novel takes place, that this was a big waste of time money and lives. Can't go into someone else's country and bomb and gun them to pieces to convince them your way of doing things is better, like we're going to replace a 2000 year old culture with ours.

O.G: What was the hardest part of writing your book?

K.B: I first wrote it in 1962 and 1963, typing it on a manual typewriter. I didn't publish it then and it sat for 45 years and I picked it up to go through it again and realized I'd have to type the whole thing all over again into the computer, but a friend of mine sent me a scanner and software that allowed me to transform the old typed pages into the word program and from then on I was able to rock and roll on the book.

O.G: Did your view of LSD and Kesey's view of LSD differ from each other?

K.B: Not much. A door to open your mind to unlimited realities; a means to expanded consciousness; a greater awareness of the material and spiritual realms; a more benevolent look at our fellow humans; need to work constantly at helping to save the world.

O.G: Who are some of your favorite authors, past or present?

K.B: R.I.P. Elmore Leonard. Others of his ilk: Michael Connelly, Ian Rankin. My current favorite: Patrick O'Brian and his 20 novels of British Navy in the early 1800's; same two lead characters in all the books. Some old favorites are Faulkner, Hemingway and James Joyce.

O.G: What is some advice you would give to a young author?

K.B: So you say you wanna write? Then sit down and write. Pen, pencil, typewriter, computer, writing tablet, cell phone whatever, lay it down, don't waste a lot of time thinking about it, pour it out, you have to read it and rework it until you are happy with it.

So you can't find a publisher? So what? in today's world you can self-publish easily. What is important is to exercise that muscle, you can do it all your life.

O.G: What are some of your future plans?

K.B: I'd like to swim in the Pacific Ocean. Complete as many of the projects I've started that I can. Stay attuned. Be healthy. Help fix what's broken. Keep on keeping on.

O.G: How has this generation changed compared to the generation you were exposed to growing up?

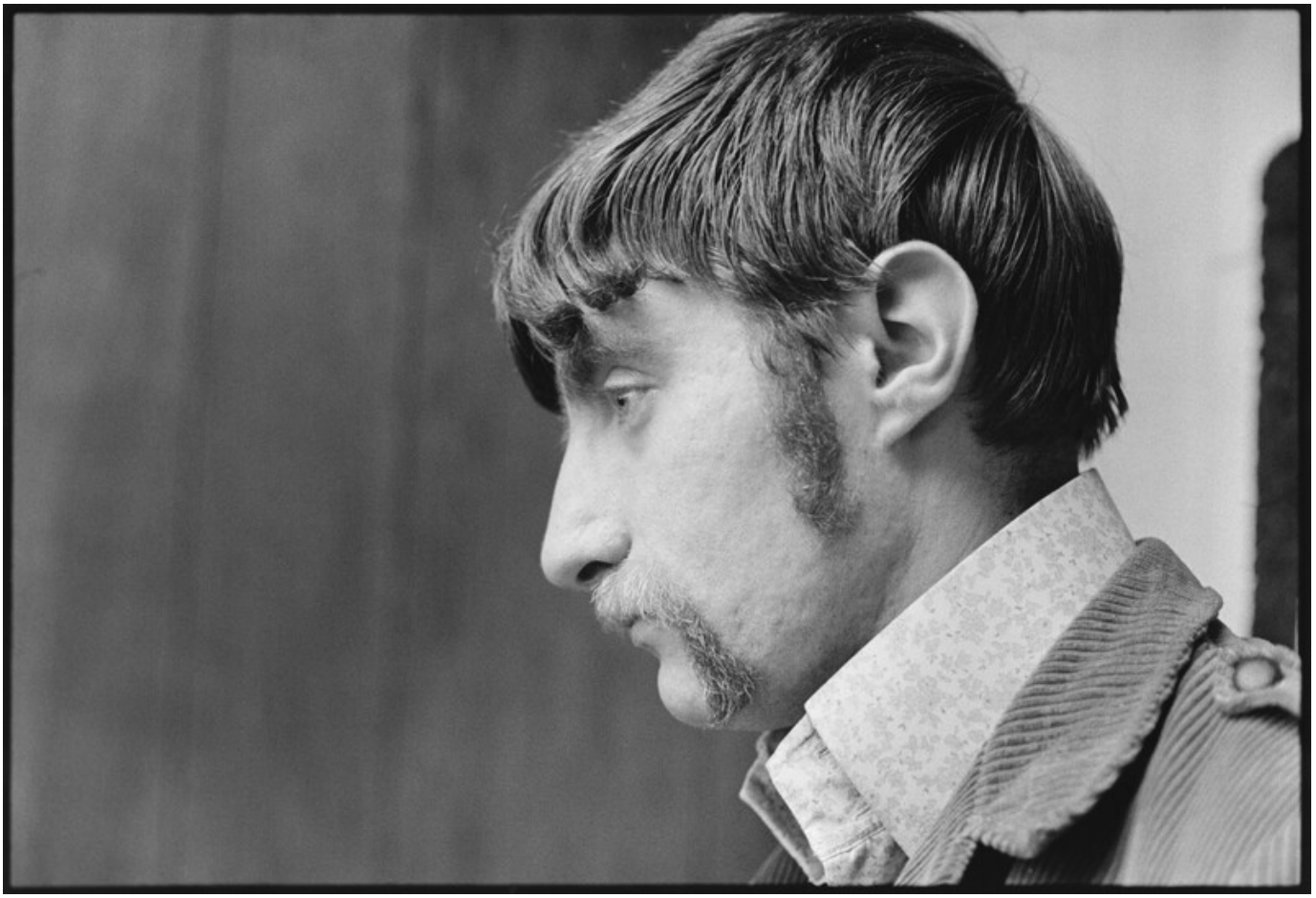
K.B: One of the most obvious things is the influence of all the handheld gadgets plus the gaming thing; so many screen-heads where once there were none. Then the TV came along and after that the explosion of electronic gizmos. Still the car rules in a large portion of society can't beat traveling in meat space but still, time behind the wheel is time taken away from turning the wheel.

O.G.: Thank you for your time Ken.

K.B: My pleasure.

EVERYBODY'S DOIN THAT RAG: An Interview with Grateful Dead Pianist Tom Constanten

Originally published in *Caper Times*, Vol 41, No. 7 - November 25, 2013. Interview conducted with Tom via e-mail on November 18, 2013



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In the interview he discussed with me his tenure with the Dead, Woodstock, and gave insight on his life and some life lessons for the younger generation of folks.

Osty Gale: I would like to know what was it that inspired you to take piano lessons and who were some of the inspirational pianists that helped you develop your own style?

Tom Constanten: I remember as a kid listening to recordings of Artur Rubinstein. He had such a wonderful tone, and he made it all seem so effortless! When I saw him play, years later, it was all the more immediate. He played the Brahms F minor Sonata. I thought back to how, as a child prodigy, he'd played to the approval of Brahms himself! Years after that I experienced the same piece again, performed by Shura Cherkassky, who had been a pupil of Josef Hofman. Way different, but no less authoritative.

O.G: You first met Phil Lesh [bassist of The Grateful Dead] in the summer of 1961, what was that like, and what was your first impression of him?

T.C: Phil and I were both into mid-twentieth century avant-garde music. This was at a time when most of the "establishment" didn't regard it as music at all. We instead were fascinated, and shared that excitement.

O.G: After the infamous 1970 New Orleans drug bust and changes in The Grateful Dead's sound toward a more folky style, what were your thoughts on leaving? Were there any hard feelings, or was it all 'smooth sailing'?

T.C: No hard feelings, but I wouldn't call it smooth sailing, either.

O.G: Do you keep in contact with Bobby and Phil to this day or do you do your own thing while they do theirs?

T.C: Saw them in the 1990s. Not since then.

O.G: While in the Dead, you and Ron "Pigpen" McKernan were said to be extremely close. What was it like living with him, and are there any stories you've never shared before?

T.C: I'd lived with Phil Lesh and Bob Weir earlier, but things were a lot more easygoing with Pigpen.

O.G: Even though you abstained from LSD while in the band, how did your views on it change before and after that decision?

T.C: I always found the psychedelic experience fascinating. In the early 1960s, though, it wasn't so much about any kind of music scene, as it was about going out into the desert and communing with primal forces. It was more about sutras than spinners.

O.G: You still keep psychedelic music alive, performing songs from the Grateful Dead, Jefferson Starship, and your own albums. How does touring now compare to when you were just starting out?

T.C: Much is the same, much is different. The years do roll along, don't they! The changes in technology have made many things easier. But back in the 1960s the procedures weren't as set as they are now. We were making it up as we went along! That meant that occasionally things got a bit flaky, but there were also windows of opportunity that have since closed. There are places you can't go to anymore. I remember

T.C: driving the Chain of Craters road in Hawaii in the 1980s, since wiped out by the volcano. In the 1970s my travels took me to Communist Hungary and Yugoslavia. An artificial world of economic deprivation. But if you brought hard currency, everything was so cheap! Memories of the Las Vegas I knew in the 1960s, the New York City in the 1950s...no movie could ever recapture them!

O.G: Describe what a normal day would be like for you.

T.C: I have several "normals." When I'm at home, I like to maintain a practice regimen. Piano pieces I'm working on. This rotates with time. For a while I was running all 27 of the Chopin Ètudes. Nowadays it's a mixed bag. Then there's the fact that 25% of the time, in any given year, I'll be out of town, usually on tour. Typically when we arrive in town, if I'm not too exhausted from travel and have some time, I'll head out exploring to Chicago, New York, London, Basel, Tokyo...wherever I happen to be.

O.G: With the 50th anniversary of Woodstock coming up, I hope you and other key figures like Bob Dylan and Wavy Gravy make an appearance. Coming out of the army and recording three albums with the Grateful Dead while playing the Summer of Love and Woodstock must have been an incredible time. How did you experience it, and what did you take away from it?

T.C: The event really captured the public's attention, but I think it was more the capstone of a movement than the driving force. Promotion had a lot to do with that. A lot of us didn't really have that great a time onstage! But the momentum had been building for a while.

O.G: Tell me a bit about "Tarot" and how that came to be?

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T.C: "Tarot" was a mime musical than ran in NYC in the early 1970s. Along with me in the band were Paul Dresher and Chicken Hirsch. It had a "dulcet charm," as described by one reviewer, and with an extra push or two, could have succeeded charmingly. That would've been dulcet, but that's showbiz.

O.G: What are some obstacles performing with different groups; i.e. Dark Star Orchestra, Bob Bralove, to performing solo?

T.C: They're not really obstacles. Things do have a way of coming up, though. To me, improvisation means responding in real time, and if you're ready, you'll adapt to the situation. When it works best, it can even feel like fun!

O.G: Your connections with the Grateful Dead have continued over the years. I gather you have collaborated with Robert Hunter. What was the outcome of that partnership?

T.C: He and I toured with two different acts. For one tour, I would do a solo set, and then he would do a solo set. Other times, he would read his poems while I accompanied him at the piano. Ray Manzarek would do the same for Michael McClure to round out the bill.

O.G: Would you rather perform live or in the studio?

T.C: Both have their attractions and problems. Mainly I concentrate on the material.

O.G: What would be some advice you would give to an aspiring musician from a small town?

T.C: It's a moving playing field. Uncertainty is the norm. I look back wistfully, imagining what might have transpired if I had my current study habits forty years ago. But even at that, the music is the easy part. Dealing with all you have to go through to get it onto that metaphorical stage is where it gets interesting!

O.G: How do you balance your touring life and personal life?

T.C: I don't know if balance is the right word. Especially in the free-for-all environment in North America, if you want to dive into the creative and performing arts, you have to resign from many of the social norms. And the benefits that go with them.

O.G: What are some goals you would still like to accomplish in your lifetime?

T.C: None of the things I look back upon with the greatest satisfaction could have been described a priori as a goal. I figure if I put my attention on the music, all that other stuff will sort itself out.

O.G: Thanks for the interview Tom!

SIFTING: An interview with former NIRVANA Drummer Chad Channing

This interview was originally published in *Caper Times*, Vol. 41, No. 9 - Jan. 27, 2014.Interview conducted November 25, 2013 via personal communication.

In this interview Chad talks about growing up, touring with Nirvana, the collapse of the Berlin Wall, his major influences and his present band, Before Cars.

Osty: How did growing up in Santa Rosa, California differ from growing up in Bainbridge near Seattle, and what were the key cultural differences and similarities?

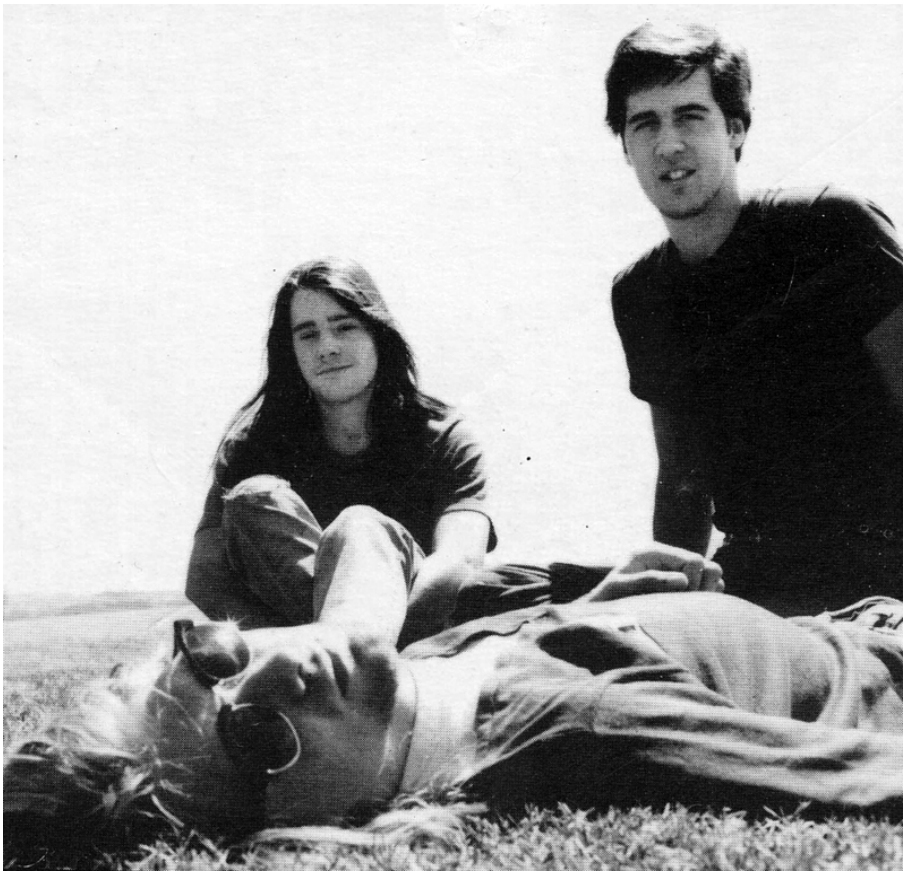
Chad Channing: Well I was just born in Santa Rosa. From there I lived in many other states such as Hawaii, Minnesota, Colorado, Alaska and Idaho. I was just 10 years old when I came to Washington State. So I experienced a lot of different cultural changes growing up as a boy. It was ok to have long hair in California but not so welcomed when I lived in Minnesota. But that was then and a lot has changed over the years

O.G: What kind of influences that you grew up with did you bring to Nirvana, as well as your other bands like The Methodists and Before Cars?

C.C: With Nirvana I guess I brought in stuff like Ultravox (band), The Stranglers, Young Marble Giants and early Modern English. I was really into a lot of punk rock as well. Similar influences were brought to the Methodists. But my real early years of listening to 70's music a lot was brought to Before Cars. I grew up with a father in the radio business. He was a DJ most my life at home.

O.G: When did you first meet Krist Novoselic and how did that come to be?

C.C: The Methodists had changed its name to Tic-Dolly-Row and we had a show in Tacoma with Nirvana who went by the name of Bliss back then. That's how I first met both Krist and Kurt.



© Photo Copyright: Charles Peterson. August, 1989, Myrtle Edwards Park, Seattle, WA.

O.G: What was it that intrigued you by the sound Nirvana was incorporating into their music, that didn't stand out in other Seattle area bands?

C.C: I never thought about the differences between Nirvana and other Seattle bands. To me we were all just doing what we wanted to do. But for me personally I was attracted to the song writing of Kurt. I liked the vocal melodies and how they were integrated into the music he wrote.

O.G: Regarding your drumming style, do you have any specific styles or techniques that you've been inspired by, by other drummers of different genres of music? Who are they?

C.C: I have always been a huge John Bonham fan. Just loved his beats and how he was able to come up with great stuff that always seemed so different from each song he played. Bill Bruford was another drummer I liked a lot. He was extremely technical and so precise. Keith Moon was fun to watch. And Mitch Mitchell had such a nice flow. I actually never really incorporated my influences in Nirvana because they wanted the drumming to be real straight forward and simple.

O.G: After working with Kurt, what did you learn and gain from him in regards to a performer and a writer?

C.C: I learned I could never play guitar left handed!. Watching him from behind the drums sometimes made me think how fun it would be to one day get out in front and sing/play guitar. It was very inspirational.

O.G: Growing up with vinyl is becoming a revived, almost underground trend today, especially as most people lean toward digital for accessibility or lack local record stores. With that in mind, what were some of your favorite albums growing up, and how have they influenced your songwriting and performance style?

C.C: I'd say Hüsker Dü "Flip Your Wig" as well as the Young Marble Giants album "Colossal Youth". I really liked how the songs flowed on these records. I've always liked the idea of having lots of simple ideas that when combined make something full.

O.G: Some of your best performed shows with NIRVANA were the tour of Europe in '89, as referenced in Bruce Pavitt's book "Experiencing Nirvana". For you, what was one of your best memories of that tour, as well as being in Europe with your fellow band mates?

C.C: I would have to say arriving in Berlin when the wall was coming down. To be in a band touring Europe and then somehow end up in Berlin at such an historic moment is something pretty special to me, especially when my father was stationed in Berlin when the wall was being built!

O.G: Tell me a little bit about how Before Cars, your present band, came to be.

C.C: Throughout the years after Nirvana I was involved in many bands and had always managed to write a few songs for the bands. I'd been told on several occasions while recording in the studio that I should one day write and record my own songs. So that's pretty much how Before Cars started. I called a few friends and asked them to help me 4-track some song ideas and they liked what I was doing. From there we made a 5 song demo and later put out a single (on vinyl). After that I recorded the Walk Back album which was more of an anthology record as it contained songs I had written before, during and after Nirvana, up until 2005. Then we recently released the record "How We Run" which consisted of all new songs.

O.G: You recently started your own record label. What have been some of the pros and cons of launching it? Do you find it easier to manage, produce, and sell music independently, or through a major label like Geffen or Roswell Records?

C.C: It was a lot of work setting up the label and also setting up things online for iTunes and other digital stores as well as sites like Pandora etc. And also setting up publishing and all that management stuff. But it's nice having the control and also getting more back from the work you do. The hard part is not having the big money to back you up with expenses as far as making and recording the records and also money for touring. And of course major labels have the money to really help promote and push your stuff.

O.G: Describe the way you write your songs with Before Cars, how do you approach it?

C.C: Normally I'll be sitting with my guitar and come up with an idea I like. From there I begin to incorporate the vocal melodies. After I'm satisfied with what I've started I will then record the song using Garage Band or Logic. Once I've done this then I bounce the song idea's down and give them to my band mates and let them come up with more idea's for the song. We will then later rehash the ideas together and decide what we like and don't like. We always approach songs with the idea of writing as many ideas as we can hear in a song. Kind of like a "climb every mountain" approach. Not every idea will survive the actual recording process but it's always worth trying.

O.G: What advice would you give to an aspiring drummer or musician growing up today?

C.C: I guess to be patient and persistent. I know it's been said before, but anything worth doing is worth the hard work, and the wait. Play all the time and have fun!

O.G: Touring today is just as tough for bands as it was in the late ’80s, with many scraping by to make a name. Do you think that’s due to the music industry, illegal downloads, falling CD sales, or a bit of both?

C.C: The advent of digital music has made it easier for musicians to get their music out there which is a good thing. But the down side as you mentioned is that it is easy to get music for free. Most musicians work very hard at what they do so it's difficult to raise money to go on tour or to pay for studio time to record a record when you’re getting nothing from your work. And if you’re with a major label, I'm guessing the loss has to come from somewhere. That would probably be the band.

O.G: While in Nirvana, were there any songs you had written that you had shown Kurt, but he rejected them?

C.C: Nope. I wanted to but the opportunity never came up.

O.G: If you could form a super group of musicians to start a band, who would they be, and what would the type of music be that you would all perform?

C.C: I don't think I would ever want to start a super group. I can't really think of one I've heard that I really liked all that much. But that being said I think it would have been cool to have Benjamin Orr as a singer for my group.

O.G: Were there any dialect tensions while in the recording studio during the recording of Bleach as well as the session for Nevermind in 1990 at Smart Studios regarding the band?

C.C: Nope. I've always been pretty easy going. And I don't have a hard time getting along with others.

O.G: What are some of your favorite television shows to watch? How do you think television has portrayed celebrities now, as opposed to back in the early 90s?

C.C: Honestly I've never been a big television show watcher although I did enjoy watching Lost and the remake of Battlestar Galactica as well as the show Heroes, which was pretty good too. I'm not sure there is much of a difference of the portrayal of celebrities now except with the different sources they can be portrayed by. I've never really paid much attention to that sort of thing. Honestly I just see them as actors doing a job they love and sharing it with others. Kind of like music.

O.G: Thank you Chad, for such an insightful interview! Lastly, are there any questions you would like to ask me?

C.C: None that I can think of at the moment. Cheers!

MY WAR: An interview with HENRY ROLLINS of Black Flag

Originally published in *Caper Times*, Vol. 41, No. 9 - Jan. 27, 2014.) Interview conducted with Henry via email November 30, 2013.

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Henry Rollins of Black Flag, 1983.

Henry Rollins is the legendary singer of the Rollins Band and Black Flag, as well as a popular spoken-word artist, author, poet, actor, activist and all-around alternative rock icon. He is an inspiration to many, from the musical scenes to the writing scenes. He grew up in Washington, D.C along with his fellow best-friend, Ian MacKaye of Fugazi and Minor Threat fame. Within this interview we discussed everything from friends, to finances, music and writing, as well as the education and gun control systems within the United States. It's true with what they say - you get what you give. He is a man where his work speaks for himself.

Osty Gale: With such a wide range of career paths—from managing a Häagen-Dazs to playing in multiple bands and working in journalism—how would you describe yourself, and how do you define who you are?

Henry Rollins: I am a journeyman worker. I work. That's what I do. That's what important to me. I have interesting jobs but I do them all for the same reason. I do them to do them well, complete them and do something else. I am not an artist. I am an Americanist. I survive the day-to-day brutality of America by working hard and smart as I can.

O.G.: What's your take on the sudden fascination with the DIY movement? Does it feel odd seeing something you've long advocated for treated as if it were brand new?

H.R.: It might be something new to someone who is new to it and that's ok. Perhaps that allows something good to happen. I am not interested in "being there first" or any of that. I think a lot of young people are perhaps encouraged by the latitude afforded by the internet and the communication and efficiency of it.

O.G.: Ian MacKaye has been a longtime friend and collaborator since your days growing up in downtown Washington. He's spoken about first meeting you—what do you remember about those early encounters, and what has kept your friendship strong over the years?

H.R.: Ian thought differently. He thought for himself. He was a leader. I was not. I learned a lot from him and still do. He was a guy in the neighborhood. We rode bikes and skateboards together and listened to a lot of music. Then Ian started making music and that's when he really started to define himself. He is a very funny and interesting person.

H.R: He's getting better with age. It is perhaps the best thing that ever happened to me, being his friend.

O.G: Talk about your interest in gay rights and same-sex marriage. Do you think as an American society, that more people still have to come to terms with the acceptance of it?

H.R: To me, it's a simple Constitutional issue, covered by the First, Fourth and Fourteenth Amendments. The way this issue has been tied to religion, blurring the lines between church and state is outrageous and cowardly. I can't not defend this. I think Americans are more and more coming to terms with it. Sadly for the haters, it's generational and their Clint Eastwood aged asses are going to be gone soon and we will be moving forward very quickly.

O.G.: When I think of emotions, I see them as neutral—shaped by circumstances and the people around us. How do your emotions factor into your role in American society, and how you're perceived through your journalism, music, and spoken word? Does that perception affect you?

H.R.: Emotions don't matter much to me when trying to make a point. That's for the tea party. They are emotional. They are angry. At what, they don't seem to be able to gather the stones to really say what's on their minds. I think they don't want to be quoted using the word nigger. As to people's emotions regarding anything I have said, that's for them to deal with. I don't say anything radical or controversial. Literacy, equality, education for all—this is radical? I think not.

O.G: With Barack Obama in his second term and Obamacare facing criticism, do you think people aren't using it to its full potential for specific reasons, or is the skepticism mainly due to unanswered questions about the program?

H.R: ACA will be fine. That's why the Republicans are so twisted up about it. If it was going to fail, they would let it. But it's not and so they are in a tizzy. If more of the states would do their share of the work, there would not be such a strain on the Federal website. This too will be overcome. Republicans fear equality. It will disturb their cash flow and great advantage. It's coming to an end and they are not happy. Oh well.

O.G.: How do you view the American economy compared to others you've seen firsthand, like South Africa, Darfur, or Iran? Do you agree with Wang Jisi's prediction that China could become the next superpower due to U.S. debt, or do you believe the American government will ultimately pull through?

H.R: America is full of money. There are a few people that are really rich and they don't do anything with their money. Billions of dollars sit still. Everyone else is told to suck it up and work harder and harder. Hey, have at it; keep voting for those who want to abolish the minimum wage. We'll see how that treats you. People often vote for the politicians whose policies disadvantage them. Again, if that's what you want, then go for it. There are some people who will have a hard time and there are others who will never be affected. The American government is the people; it's not some alien body like the tea party wants you to think. It's not the enemy, it's us. If it "sucks" then you suck, so improve it or be happy that you suck. Many Americans need to grow up and put their shoulder into it.

O.G.: In today's tech-driven age of constant gadgets and screens, do you worry that the next generation—my generation—may struggle to care for the environment unless we actively step up? Has this trend of being labeled 'slackers' and retreating from physically active living made things harder than in past generations?

H.R.: You will do or not do the right thing. You will have the opportunity to pass or fail. You have all the smarts, tools and energy. We'll see what you do with the information and the opportunities you have. I don't know what else to say to an adult. They're adults, at some point; you take your hands off the wheel and wish them the best of luck.

O.G.: As a high school graduate who's built a wide-ranging career in music, journalism, publishing, and activism, how do you view today's education system compared to when you were in school? Do you think student workloads are too lenient, or does it largely depend on individual school boards?

H.R.: I think America is investing in crime and war. Teach to the test, don't allow young people to learn to use their minds and you will quickly have millions of people who will fight for shitty jobs, be eager to go to war and haul their asses into new mega prisons. You want a country that is impervious to invasion and destruction from outside, you make it strong on the inside. Read Lincoln's speech from January 1838, the Speech to the Young Men's Lyceum. Tells you all you need to know:http://www.abrahamlincolnonline.org/lincoln/speeches/lyceum.htm. How do you do that, you educate your people. If they are stupid, they will do stupid things. You might want to think about what kind of country you want to live in. It starts with you.

O.G: Thinking back on your time touring with Black Flag, is there a story, funny, serious, or both, that stands out? How did that experience impact you, positively or negatively?

H.R: Too tired.

O.G: What current bands are you listening to at the moment?

Henry Rollins: Marnie Stern, Thee Oh Sees, Ty Segall, Fuzz, My Cat Is An Alien, High on Fire, Savages. Those are good bands.

O.G: Your aggression and abrasive nature are well known and often misinterpreted by press and fans, yet you exude emotional honesty and self-awareness. How do you handle misguided critics or fans? I know the easy answer is to say 'Fuck them,' but is there more to how you respond to those misconceptions about you and your work?

H.R.: It is up to me to be as clear as I can. If something is not understood, that was my fault and I have to get it better next time. As to critics, I don't pay any attention to what anyone writes about me. Perhaps if there was something slanderous, like if someone said I had assaulted someone or whatever, sure, but if someone didn't like my show and wanted to write about it, the First Amendment green lights that and I wouldn't have it any other way.

O.G: Based on your experiences, you're a man of tenacity, strong work ethic, and dedication—qualities honed with Black Flag and your drive to succeed. Beyond those, what skills have you gained from life on the road, from the '80s hardcore punk scene to your current spoken word tours?

H.R.: I don't have any skill really. I have tenacity and a lot of anger. I am an angry person. I don't want to hit anyone or anything. I want to do things. I want to go. I want to know. I want to do something all the way, finish it and then run at something else and do it and go from there. It's not about money or fame, it's about kicking ass and getting onto the next thing. That's it.

O.G: What would some advice you would give to an aspiring writer, musician, or journalist starting off in this era of creativity?

H.R.: Don't ask for advice. Just do your thing. I never asked advice. I never asked if I should be in a band and what would happen if it didn't work out. I went for it. The idea that things were not going to work out was impossible for me to believe. I was ready to die for it. If you have to ask, perhaps you shouldn't go. For myself, I was not going to be stopped by anything; it never once crossed my mind.

O.G: What lies ahead in the future for you, in regards to your life, your hopes, your dreams and your future works; whether it be books, films, or any form or artist media?

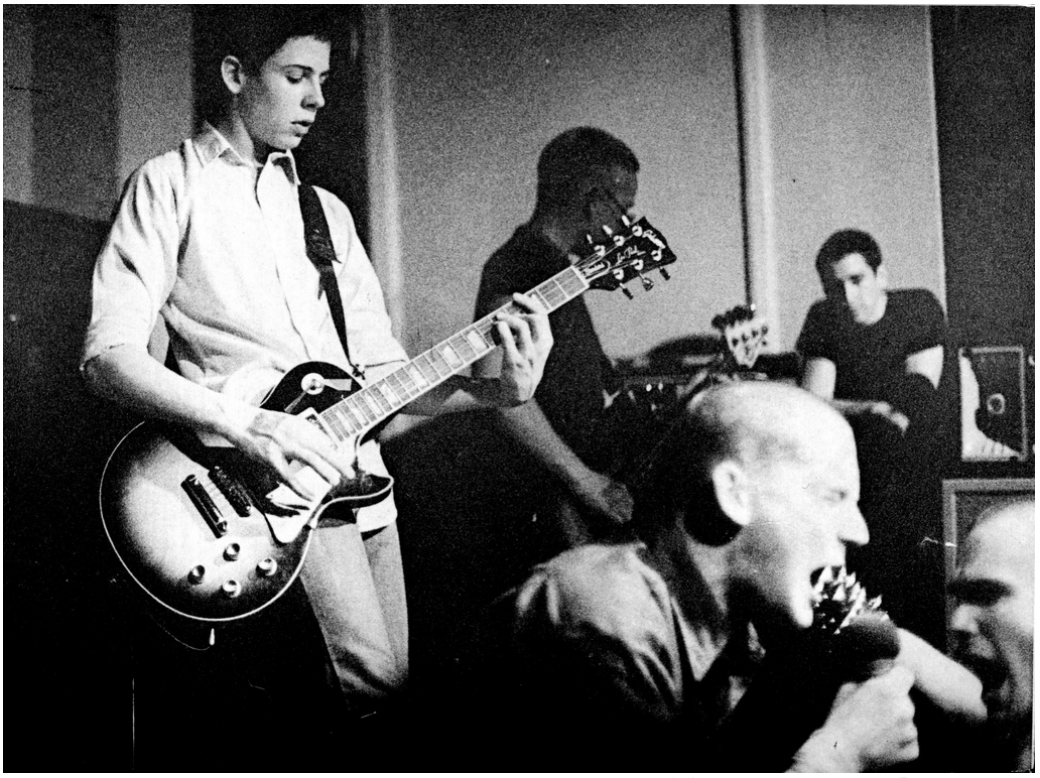
H.R: I keep things open. We'll see. I have a lot of things lined up, television, books, film, travel, etc. Hopefully something else will come up to keep things interesting.

O.G: Thanks for your time Henry.

H.R: It was my pleasure.

OUT OF STEP: An interview with IAN MACKAYE

Originally published on alternativenation.net, on January 22, 2014. Interview conducted via telephone with Ian, on December 6, 2013



Copyright: Malcolm Riviera (Malco23), CC BY-SA 3.0. MacKaye (bottom right, with microphone) performing with Minor Threat on April 4, 1981 at The Wilson Center in Washington, D.C.

In this interview, we discussed the Do-it-Yourself movement, the music industry, the educational and gun control systems within the United States, and his best friend, fellow hardcore musician, speaker, and presenter, Henry Rollins.

Osty Gale: So starting at the beginning, can you talk about Washington, D.C and what was it like growing up there?

Ian MacKaye: It just is what it is. I don't have any reference points other than that I grew up here. I think I'm a 5th or 6th generation Washingtonian, so my family, we were born and raised here and I never left. I love it here. So how was it? Yeah it was good I guess, I don't have any complaints.

O.G: What's your take on the sudden fascination with the DIY movement? Does it seem a bit odd that people are suddenly taking up a cause for which you've been an advocate for years as if it were something new?

Ian MacK:: I think that your question presupposes that there is a fascination that is something new, but it's not. It's been going on for years, and people have always been interested in this stuff. Of course, there's always been a minority, because the majority of our nations don't give a fuckin' rat's ass about DIY. But although I may have been one of the early sort-of practitioners of what was called DIY, I wasn't one of the first. The hippies were the DIY people in the late '60s, and before them were the beatnik poets of the '50s. DIY is nothing new—it's just another name for the underground. As long as there's been a mainstream, there's been an underground. You have the overground and the underground. Jazz, blues, punk, rock and roll—they all came from the same place, and at some point, they became the voice of a counterculture and an underground. So what you call the "current fascination" isn't new. There will always be an underground as long as there's an overground.As for my role, I decided long ago that I wanted to be a "pilot light." It may not always be "hot," but I like being part of the mechanism that might reignite something. I feel deeply fortunate to have discovered the underground and countercultural world through music, punk, whatever you want to call it. I feel indebted to it, and I try to maintain a pilot light so others will come across it. You don't necessarily have to do what I do, but hopefully it'll give people a way to learn about it, the same way I learned through other people's work.

O.G: Do you have any memories of the first couple of shows you played?

Ian MacK:: "Of course, I remember all of the shows I've played. The first show I played, I played bass in a band called The Slinkees. We performed in a garage on Macarthur Blvd in August of 1979, we with a band called The Zones, which was the first show I ever played. The next band I played with was a band called the Teen Idles. From there, it was Minor Threat and then Fugazi. Now my wife and I have our own band called "The Evens".

O.G: Regarding America and its history with gun control, what do you see needs to be done for a more peaceful, controlled nation?

Ian MacK:: I believe guns and bullets should be destroyed. I don't expect that to happen, and I don't like guns, nor do I believe in a right to own or bear them. It's ridiculous. Like many issues in this country, corporate influence drives extremes. Guns kill many people here, as do drunk drivers—but we normalize alcohol, celebrate bars, review beers. The reason is simple: profit.It's not about denying people the right to drink or own guns; it's about recognizing how profit shapes society, often with deadly consequences.The same applies to healthcare. The U.S. system is appalling and so expensive that people avoid care until emergencies force government coverage—effectively universal healthcare by default. The irony is clear: profit, not public need, dictates access. Even Obama's healthcare reform was written with heavy insurance industry influence—an example of profit overriding common sense. If it were up to me, I'd make guns disappear. But it isn't. I don't like them, I don't own them, and I don't need them.

O.G.: It is well-known that you're best friends with Henry Rollins, since you two grew up together in downtown Washington. Could you describe to me, what it was like first meeting him, and how besides similar music interests, that you've kept that interesting relationship with him all these years?"

Ian MacK: When I first met Henry Rollins, I thought he was a pretty cool kid with a snake, a BB gun and a bunch of cool records. I don't really know how we've been friends for all these years. We have a really shared experience with one another. In 1978 Henry and I took a greyhound bus together, I was sixteen and he was 17. We took a Greyhound bus to California to go skateboarding together, and then we took the bus all the way back. That was about 7-8 days on a fuckin' bus and we just rolled. It's not like we always got along. We certainly had some tough patches over the years you know but at the end of the day we sort of signed onto one another as family. "

O.G.: "hen the Riot Grrrl Movement that started happening in the early to mid-nineties, what were your thoughts on it, and what are your thoughts on such a movement happening now?

Ian MacK: I knew the people in the beginning of the movement. I knew the woman who coined the phrase, Kathleen Hanna, she's a really intelligent woman and I was around for that and I thought it was fascinating and pretty exciting. Like a lot of things though, it got complicated.

Osty Gale: "You're known as an avid collector, shall we say, or preserver, so what are your thoughts on digitizing media, that in the not so distant future could be extinct, in physical form?

Ian MacK: I don't really care about the music industry. [Laughs] What I care about is music. I prefer vinyl records, that's what I cut my teeth on. I like listening to records and have a relationship with music that way, but I also listen on cassette, CD, and computer. If you ask me, I prefer records; that's just what I'm used to. Music defies formats. Music is beyond formats. Formats are part of the industry; a monopoly that's lasted over a hundred years, so changes in format haven't affected me much.

Ian MacK: As a record label owner, digital downloads could potentially disrupt things. With downloads, our bank account goes up because iTunes wires money in. We don't do anything. With physical records, you make them, house them, count them, pack and ship them—you have a tactile relationship with the work. With digital, you do it once, and every download adds money to your account. There's no way to count them or hold them; iTunes could send four cents or four million dollars, and you have no way of knowing.Some people listen on cassettes, others on records.

Ian MacK: I don't care. It's not about formats. It's just what people want. I assume music will take another form eventually.

O.G: What are your thoughts in regard to the education system today, as opposed to when you were attending school?

Ian MacK: I'm really seeing how the public school system in Washington works, and I’m stunned by how much privatization has crept in through the financial district.

Ian MacK:In terms of what kids are being taught, that’s a concern, but for me the bigger point is that public schools give children a chance to spend time with peers they’d never meet otherwise.

Ian MacK: Private schools have commonality—you’re in a Christian, Jewish, Quaker school, or you’re just rich.Private schools reinforce bias, but public schools bring together a diverse mix: rich and poor, black and white, kids who wouldn’t otherwise interact.

Ian MacK: At that age, in that environment, there’s something truly beautiful and instructional. It teaches what life is: we live in a world of differences, and we have to coexist. I’m not sold on every educational scheme, but I think it’s fantastic that my son is engaging with all these other kids

Osty Gale: What would some advice you would give to an aspiring writer, musician, or journalist starting off in this era of creativity?

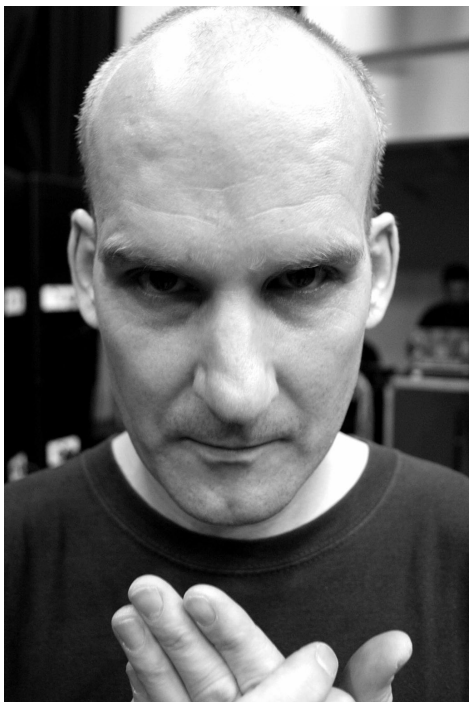
Ian MacK: My advice to anyone, a journalist, musician, or otherwise is simple: whatever you choose to do, really love it and enjoy the time you spend doing it. That way, even if you never achieve the success you imagine, at least you’ve spent your life doing something you love. Most people don’t do that—they speculate, chase jobs they don’t care about, thinking it will lead to success, and in the meantime, they’re unhappy. Life is fleeting, so you might as well fucking love what you’re doing.

O.G: What are some bands that you're listening to at the moment, and do you have any questions for me?

Ian MacK: I don't have any questions for you, but my grandmother, she was a journalist in the late '60's and early '70's and she would counsel married couples going through a marriage crisis and I've been finding these boxes of tapes and trying to organizing them. I've been recently listening to these people talk about their lives; it's been pretty damn interesting!

O.G: Thank you so much for your time Ian; it was wonderful talking with you.

Ian MacK: Thank you. Good luck my friend.



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An interview with DAVID LOVERING of THE PIXIES

Originally published in *Caper Times*, Vol. 41, No. 10, February 10, 2014. Interview conducted with David via telephone December 12, 2013.

In the interview, we spoke about new music, touring, welcoming bassist Paz Lenchantin, the departures of former bassists Kim Deal and Kim Shattuck, music videos, and the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame.

Osty Gale: What was it like for you growing in Massachusetts?

Dave Lovering: It was wonderful growing up there. It's the only place I really ever knew growing up. It was quite annoying and cold in the winters and everything but you know; it was great. What was an amazing thing to me was that cold in the winters and stuff and when I was old enough to realize that people lived north of me up in Canada, I was like "Are you kidding me?! (Laughs) That made me a huge Canada fan. I've been a huge Canada fan ever since.

O.G: Do you remember your first concert you went to? What was that experience like?

D.L: The first concert I went to was Jethro Tull, and that might've been in 1979, in Boston. That was my first real concert in an arena and it was amazing. It was fantastic, because I was a huge Jethro Tull fan as well and that's why it stands out to me so much, and I'll never forget it.

O.G: Who were some of your influences on your drumming technique?

D.L: For me, it would be any drummer from Steely Dan, because they're all session drummers; so any Steely Dan drummer, Jon Bonham from Led Zeppelin, and Neil Peart from RUSH.

O.G: Do you think 2013 has been a good year for music, overall?

D.L: I'm not the best person to ask this question. I don't really listen to a lot of music, the only music that I get to listen to really is music when I'm driving my car, listening to XM Satellite radio. I'm listening to a lot of HAIM, an indie pop band from Los Angeles, at the moment. They're really good and I really like them.

O.G: What was the inspiration for the new video "Another Toe in the Ocean"? How did that come about?

D.L: What we did was hire a different video director for each song we released, letting them create their own interpretations with no input from us. So every video that's come out so far reflects the director's vision. As for this one, I really like it! Especially the cartoon character, which looks like Charles from Pixies.

O.G: As far as set lists for the North American tour go, will we be seeing any new songs slated for future release?

D.L: Yes, we do. For the past two months on the European tour, we've been playing songs from EP-1 along with other tracks. We'll be performing new songs people may not be familiar with, including some that won't be released until EP-2 comes out sometime soon.

O.G: What are your feelings towards working with all these different bassists since the departure of Kim Deal (Founding Pixies member, left in June 2013)?

D.L: Oh it's wonderful! Of course, no one will replace Kim, it's impossible to do that. But we hired Kim Shattuck (The Muffs), she was hired to do the European tour, and we've got Paz Lenchantin (A Perfect Circle) who's going to work with us straight into the new year of 2014 coming up. It's been fantastic. It's a fun experience and it makes it interesting! It's different for me, because I've played for a number of years with Kim, so it's interesting to perform with new bass players. It keeps me on my toes.

O.G: As a band, what factors led you to choosing Paz Lenchantin as a replacement for bassist Kim Shattuck?

D.L: She's fantastic! She has got the chops and she's a wonderful woman so she's got it all going for her. She's actually really, really good. It's one of those "Top Bassist's in the World"- types of things, and she's even getting me to perform better.

O.G: What do you think she will bring to the band in regards to studio releases?

D.L: We actually just talked about that in rehearsal. Joe Santiago, Paz, Charles, and I. We said, 'Wow, you should bring in your violin.' There's an old song we played for years called 'In Heaven' that we recorded on a demo tape back in March '87, and we thought it would be a good one for Paz to play violin on. We're just tossing the idea around, since it's tough. Pixies songs are very bass-driven, so stepping away to play another instrument isn't easy. But with 'In Heaven,' we do it in a more instrumental way, where violin could work. I don't know if it'll ever happen, but we're talking about it right now.

O.G: What is your view on the Rock N Roll Hall of Fame nominees this year? Who do you predict will get the award?

D.L: Oh God… This is a tough one, I just don't know. Well RUSH finally got in and I'm really happy they did. Cheap Trick, I don't know if they got in, I hope they did. Cheap Trick is one of my favorite bands. I think they might've been inducted, I don't know. I know Nirvana might be inducted this year, I don't know when we'll be inducted. I'd like to see that happen someday. It would be nice.

O.G: Regarding Kim Shattuck's comments about being fired for being "over enthusiastic", what are your feelings towards her comments and what did you think when you first heard this statement?

D.L: As a gentleman, I'll say it was unprofessional. It was coming from a different place.

O.G: That's all the questions, thank you for your time David. Happy Holidays.

D.L: Perfect Osty, thank you so much! Happy Holidays in the coming year. It was a pleasure speaking with you.

The Pixies kick off their North American tour in support of EP-1 January 15th 2014, at Massey Hall in Toronto. FIDLAR opens.

Really, Really Happy: An Interview with KIM SHATTUCK of THE MUFFS

Originally published January 8, 2014 for *AlternativeNation*.

This interview was conducted with Kim Shattuck via e-mail, on January 7, 2014.

In the interview, she discusses The Muffs' new album, the truth about her Pixies departure, reactions to David Lovering and Phil Everly, her influences, and more!

Osty Gale: What is the biggest misconception about yourself and The Muffs?

Kim Shattuck: People think it's easy to play our songs. That is until they try to play them. We are more complex than we sound.

Osty: With the upcoming album set for February 14, 2014, will it continue the love/hate themes of your earlier work?

Kim: First let me say that the release date for our album is in April or May 2014. The songs are about like and dislike; random thoughts and goofy things.

Osty: What was the biggest fear you had when first forming The Muffs in 1991?

Kim: "I am fearless usually. The way I go through life is pretty carefree and fun. At the time the Muffs started I was pretty sure I was the only person writing good songs at the time. It was 1991 so it may have been true. My only worry was that I needed to get amps that didn't blow up constantly. That gets old after a while."

Osty: What is your biggest fear now with The Muffs, in 2014?

Kim: I have no fear.

Osty: After decades with The Muffs & touring with The Pandoras, what lessons have you learned about yourself and the music industry?

Kim: We had to learn about managing ourselves. I learned how to produce and engineer our records which saves us a grip of cash. And I no longer have to fight with producers about the sound of our records. We are truly Do-It-Yourself.

Osty: As The Muffs will be touring in support of the new album, do you and the band have any supporting acts you would like to share the stage with this year on your tour?

Kim: There are lots of great bands out there. I'm very fond of a Los Angeles band called Honeychain.

Osty: Can you tell me how you and your husband, Kevin, met?

Kim: We had mutual friends and met at a barbeque. Then we left the party to go to Bob Odenkirk's illegal home casino he was doing that night. Kevin won $200 playing craps and then the police came over and scared us all off.

Osty: John Everson once described your sound as "Joan Jett singing Everly Brothers tunes with The Ramones backing." With Phil Everly's recent passing, will The Muffs, or you solo, be covering any of their songs on the upcoming tour?

Kim: If I was going to cover the Everly's I would do it with my sister, Kristen.

Osty: Related to The Everly Brothers, have you heard the "Foreverly" album by punk rocker Billy Joe Armstrong & Norah Jones? What is your take on it?

Kim: "I haven't heard it yet but I love both of their voices."

Osty: In the underground punk scene, you've seen other bands fall apart.How has that shaped your perspective? Are you happy with where The Muffs are, or do you hope to reach a level bigger than Nirvana?

Kim: My goals are more about song writing and not about popularity at all. We like to do our thing and that's all I care about doing.

Osty: Do you think buying physical albums:vinyl, cassette, or CD, has declined because of digital platforms like iTunes and YouTube? I still hunt for original vinyl for its sound. What's your take on it?

Kim: I buy most of my music digitally but I love vinyl. I like that there are a million different ways to hear music.

Osty: How important is an album cover to you? Is it a key factor in whether someone buys the album, or do you prefer a simple, laid-back approach like The Ramones' band name + photo style?

Kim: "I am super picky about the way our albums look. I'm picky about every aspect of everything, always."

Osty: When deciding the track list order, how do you and The Muffs approach it? Is it collaborative, or do you, as the main songwriter, simply decide the order?

Kim: We all come up with different album orders and then we talk about it. It takes us a long time to figure that out because there's an art to it and it needs to flow a certain way.

Osty: You've stated in countless interviews that your sound is influenced by the punk of The Ramones as well as other acts like The Pixies, The Kinks, etc., but are there any modern bands that inspire you now?

Kim: I'm still inspired by the Kinks and the Beatles."

Osty: I interviewed Pixies drummer David Lovering around the same time I was attempting to connect with you for an interview (November 2013), and I asked him about the recently made comments surrounding the manager firing you. I question whether, as someone who was still a fan of the band, you could ever envision working with them again, or if that chapter had closed after Charles remarked, 'The change wasn't that big of a deal.' In retrospect, the moment felt ironic, as it seemed to foreshadow the earlier events of 2009, when you performed with The Pixies while Kim Deal was sidelined with the flu.

Kim: I just saw the article you are talking about. David says I was unprofessional for saying that I might have been fired for being overly enthusiastic. That's pretty funny. I didn't ever say that. That was an online mutation of my original statement. I was asked if I could point to something that in retrospect could have been a turning point in my relationship with the Pixies and I told them about the manager yelling at me after jumping into the crowd at the Mayan in Los Angeles. Since the Pixies had their manager fire me over the phone and no reason was given for firing me, I had to speculate. What would actually be unprofessional is if I told everyone what really went on behind the scenes but I won't. I know they wouldn't appreciate their mystique being compromised.

Osty: Could you tell me about the first concert you attended, and how did it influence your decision to ultimately want to play in a band?

Kim: My first concert was The Go Go's at the Irvine Meadows in 1982. It was a great show. My friends and I rented a limo and we were only sitting in the lawn seats. It was kind of grandiose. Then somebody who was sitting behind me passed me a cup full of barf. I passed it on to the person in front of me."

Osty: What would your advice be to anyone that would want to start a band and make music?

Kim: "Be true to yourself and learn the business side of things. There are a lot of sharks out there waiting to supposedly help you when they're really helping themselves to your hard earned money. And don't chase trends.

Osty: How do you feel about the legalization of marijuana in Colorado, and also what are your thoughts on Edward Snowden?

Kim: Questions about pot, feminism and Ed Snowden are outside my range of knowledge. I do like Edward Snowden though.

Osty: What is the best thing about performing in Canada, and do you think The Muffs will ever come to Halifax, Nova Scotia?

Kim: I love Canada. I really hope we get to do some shows there. The people are cool. They're totally funny and creative.

Osty: Thank you for the interview Kim.

Kim: Hope I gave you enough answers!! Thanks so much!!!

Photo ©: Mario from Madrid, Spain - The Muffs - Live Madrid 2009, CC BY 2.0 (via: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:The_Muffs_-_Kim_Shattuck_-_Madrid_2009.jpg)

POP TUNE : An interview with Naoko Yamano of SHONEN KNIFE

Oirignally published via *AlternativeNation* & *Caper Times*, Feb.2014.
Interview conducted with Naoko via email correspondence in January 2014

© Kaethe17 - Shonen Knife in der Roten Sonne, May 2025. CC BY 4.0, https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=164969716

I chatted with Naoko, Shonen Knife's vocalist and guitarist, about the band's legendary career, her musical influences, the story behind their name, their new album, and how music is experienced differently in Japan, the U.S., and Canada. Here's what she had to say.

Osty Gale: What was it like growing up in Japan in the early 60's and 70's?

Naoko: The 60's and 70's are very good years for rock music. Many great bands like The Beatles or KISS were around. For daily life, I grew up in the downtown area and I could buy records in town and listened to radio a lot. There are not so much differences between now and back then except for the Internet.

Osty: Naoko, as you're the only original member in the band, has your outlook on the band changed over the years since you first formed the band in 1981?

Naoko: "Shonen Knife is continuing to grow. The present lineup is the best lineup in our 30 years as a band.

Osty: Who has been the biggest influence on your career, both musically and non-musically?

Naoko: "Musically, it is The Beatles, as for non-musically, I don't have any special person."

Osty: How did you come up with the band name "Shonen Knife"?

Naoko: "When we got together as a band, I just happened to see a pencil-sharpening knife with the brand name "shonen knife" stamped on the side, and I thought, "That's it!" The "shonen" part means "boy", so it's kind of cute, and "knife" sounds exciting, so I thought "Shonen Knife" was perfect for our band name and sound."

Osty: What are some contrasts to the mainstream rock songs in Japan to the mainstream rock songs in Canada/ United States?

Naoko: "J-POP's lyrics are Japanese and the basic melody lines are different. I can't explain well, though. You can try to listen to J-POP songs through the internet or YouTube. I like rock songs in Canada/ United States."

Osty: With a new album coming out in 2014 of the New Year, what sort of themes and subjects will be on this album? Can we expect a more 60's-styled Surf Rock album like 2012's Pop Tune?

Naoko: "The concept and the subjects are not decided. I'm still in the process of writing songs but I'd like to make an album which is enjoyed and loved by many people."

Osty: Does the new album have a name yet?

Naoko: "Not yet. I have to think of it."

Osty: When does the band usually agree on the album name, track listing, etc.…?

Naoko: "I decide everything by myself. The other band members are supporting me a lot."

Osty: Your songs aren't typical "songs" in regards to themes such as; love, politics, losing friends or gaining fame. Is this approach to writing themes within your music the conventional style in Japan, or is it centric to your band / other rock acts in Japan?

Naoko: "I don't want to write metaphysical lyrics. My lyrics are simple and easy to understand. I just like that. I don't listen to J-POP music and I don't know the lyrics so much."

Osty: Have you ever thought about writing a memoir or a book regarding the history of Shonen Knife? If so, what would you want it to be called?

Naoko: "We are still on the way to become more popular. It might be better to make a history book after we get famous."

Osty: As a fan of your band, Shonen Knife, and Nirvana I would like to ask if there were there any interesting things that happened on that 1993 tour you did with Nirvana and The Breeders?

Naoko: "The tour was massive and the dressing rooms of Nirvana and us were far apart. There weren't so many chances to talk with the members of Nirvana. I just remember that there were many people at their dressing rooms and catering cargo was touring with the bands."

Osty: What are your feelings towards Nirvana being inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall Of Fame?

Naoko: "That's very nice. Nirvana is a great band."

Osty: Looking back on the years of your band, did you ever think you would be touring for over thirty years? What are your feelings towards this?

Naoko: "I've never thought I would be continuing the band so long but I don't look back and I can't imagine that the thought of "I used to be in this band". I'm just going to keep making music."

Osty: What has been your biggest challenge as a band? Have you been able to overcome that challenge? If so, how did you overcome it?

Naoko: "Everything for Shonen Knife is the biggest challenge for me. Every show, every recording..."

Osty: When you performed in Canada for the first time, what were some things you did not like about the country and what were some things you really did like about our country?

Naoko: "I love Canada a lot. People are kind and so nice to us. Our audience in Canada is very friendly and they rock."

Osty: What was the most impressive show the band has played in 2013, to you?

Naoko: “It was on September 29th at "Dingwalls", in Camden, London. The show was request set. It was so fun.“

Osty: In 10 years, do you think Shonen Knife will still be around or will you take up your time to do other things within music or writing?

Naoko: “I can't imagine. I'm occupied with the present activities of the band.”

Osty: In your own words, what makes an amazing writer, whether it is musical writing or just a writer in general?

Naoko: “Creativity.”

Osty: What are some new bands and artists that you’re listening to now?

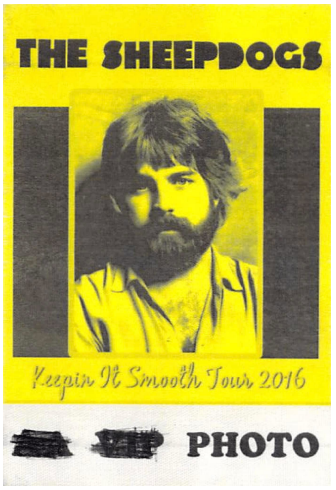
Naoko: “Hmm... I'm studying '70's bands now. Please introduce “new” interesting bands to me.”

Osty: What advice do you have for people who want to form their own bands?

Naoko: “Keep on rockin'!”

Osty: Thank you for the interview Naoko! Happy New Year!

Future Nostalgia: An Interview with Sam Corbett of The Sheepdogs



This interview originally was published on *AlternativeNation*. The interview was conducted in-person,on March, 2016, prior to their gig.

I'm here with Sam Corbett, the drummer of the Canadian Rock & Roll/ Southern rock-influenced band, The Sheepdogs who just released their newest album *Future Nostalgia* on Warner Records/Dine Alone Records this past October, and whom are currently on tour in support of it.

Osty: How's the tour is going so far?

Sam: The tour has been really good. It's been long, but it's almost over now. We have five shows left, and the whole tour has been good so far.

Osty: How has it been having Beat Cops touring with your band on the road?

Sam: They've been really good, y'know ? I haven't seen them play before, but I listened to their album and i really liked it.They're from Montreal, and they're a really good live band; I really like their songs a-lot. They've been great, getting the crowd really fired-up. They are a very high energy band for sure.

Osty: When did you first want to learn drums, was it at University of Saskatchewan?

Sam: I didn't take drums in University, but we were going into University of Saskatchewan and we were bored with our classes and decided we were going to start a band and it basically….

Osty: Changed your life?

Sam: Absolutely! It changed our life. But yeah, I then rented a drum kit, and Ewan Currie and Ryan Gullen came over that day and we started the band.

Osty: In terms of playing bigger sized or smaller sized venues, which do you prefer, and why?

Sam: "I prefer to do both. It's one thing that's been great about this tour is that we've played some larger venues, and we've also played some smaller intimate-club type shows. It's very nice to mix it up, because there are advantages to both - More intimate is great but it's also great to look out and see a sea of heads out there in the audience as well."

Osty: What were some of your influences for this record, Future Nostalgia in terms of style and playing, as compared to the previous record The Sheepdogs?

Sam: "It's a natural progression from our previous music. We've always looked back to the Sixties and Seventies, but this time we dove deeper. We love the Beatles, the Stones, and Led Zeppelin, then moved into bands like CSNY, the Allman Brothers, and the Grateful Dead, and eventually more obscure artists like Bobby Charles. Along with that, we revisited old soul and late-Sixties country-funk. Those deeper cuts from that era, really shaped the sound of the album.

Osty: The Style on Future Nostalgia really is different from previous albums, how was it working with Patrick Carney of The Black Keys (The Sheepdogs, 2012) ? What did you take away from that experience?

Sam: Yeah it is! There's no one way to make an album, there's a lot of different ways to do it. Working with Pat on The Sheepdogs (2012), it was a very good experience and we learned a lot. It made us realize that maybe we really wanted a little bit more control of this one (Future Nostalgia) and that was an influence. But there were also other things that we took from those recording sessions that helped informed this one as well.

Osty: Like what ?

Sam: You know, he told me one time during the recording process: "Most Hip-Hop songs are on 90 BPM." and I went "well why does that matter?" and he told me "It's kind of a natural groove tempo." So there are some songs on that album that are on 90 BPM. For this album, we also have some songs that are 90 BPM, although it's not intentional, so it may be a subliminal thing like "this is a good tempo to be rocking out at!

Osty: In your opinion - The Grateful Dead or The Allman Bros, which is the ultimate Jam band?

Sam: I'd pick The Allman Brothers for sure. I always liked Gregg Allmans singing more-so than any singer within the Dead,and i just always gravitated towards the Allman Brothers Band more. I haven't listened to The Grateful Dead as much, maybe I should get into it a bit more. I mean, I like American Beauty and stuff like that, but I've just always gravitated more towards the Allman Brothers.

Osty: What's your stance on people using their cell phones at your concerts?

Sam: I don't mind them when people use them at shows recording stuff, sometimes i'll view the recordings online on YouTube that people have posted. What I don't like is if someone is in the front row of the concert and is looking down at their phone while the concert is going on. It detracts from the moment & experience and I wonder like "Why is this person in the front row if you're just going to look at your cell-phone the whole time?" I don't know.

Osty: What was your first concert that changed your life?

Sam: My first concert was when I had just turned nineteen years of age and went to a bar called Meegos in Saskatoon, which the Sadie's performed at that night.That concert made a strong impression on me and opened up some possibilities. I was really impressed, and I had never heard of them before. It made me believe that there could be a local club setting within Saskatoon and that I could do the same and be something.

Osty: Who are some drummers that inspired you when you started playing?

Sam: Well the whole reason I got into drumming was basically listening to Led Zeppelin and really liking Jon Bonham a lot. I really liked and aspired to be someone like that; somebody really flashy, or someone like Mitch Mitchell. Then The more I started to play drums and listen to music from that era, I started to be more influenced by more basic,groove-oriented, simplified players like Ringo, Levon Helm or Al Jackson from Booker T & The MGs. You can hear just about every kind of drumming and get an inspiring idea from it.

Osty: I've read in previous interviews that The Sheepdogs took influence from The Band's Music From Big Pink, and The Stones' Exile On Main Street, and was then secluded in Stony Lake, Ontario for similar effect. How did that seclusion change the way the songs were written/composed, as compared to previous sessions?

Sam: Compared to our previous album The Sheepdogs, Future Nostalgia was much more fully developed going into the studio. The songs were well rehearsed and clearly defined, whereas the 2012 record was built around more half-formed ideas, including songs I hadn't even played before. That was an interesting challenge, but I prefer being prepared, and this time we were. Being able to self-produce with no distractions also made a big difference. It allowed us to stay focused and make the record as true to ourselves as possible.

Osty: Whom are your top 3 favourite drummers as of now, and why?

Sam: It would still be Bonham at Number 1. The second and third would be The Beatle's Ringo and then Levon Helm. I know that isn't the most original answers in the world… actually, one of my favourite drummers right now is Stevie Wonder. A lot of people don't realize that he does the drumming on most of his early 70s albums (Songs In the Key Of Life, Talking Book, Innervisions… He does all the drumming on them, and it's really spectacular. It's a little unconventional at times, in the best of ways, so its great to listen to try and figure out what kind of beats/drum patterns he's doing."

Osty: Which drummer do you prefer, if you could only pick one drummer: Bill Lordan (from Gyspy) , or David Thomson (The People's Choice) ?

Sam: One drummer? You know, I'm not super familiar with either of those guys…I love the guy in the People's Choice video, so I'll have to go with him. (David Thompson)

Osty: Are there any new elements or styles you'd like to explore for new material / a new record in the future, or keep it how it is?

Sam: I think it'll probably be like an extension of the same genre, but swimming further out. There might be material that is more country-influenced, or more soul-influenced. I'm not too entirely sure. Ewan Currie (singer/lead guitarist) writes the songs, and I know he's been writing some new stuff that I've been listening to that sounds great. We're hopefully going to record later this year and have something out for next year.

Osty: I've read that most song collaborations within the band happen while on the road, is their still a lot of song collaboration within the band on the road now?

Sam: It depends. I think Ewan just gets an idea for a riff or a melody and he sings it into his phone and later, sometimes he'll have the song structures and ideas fully fleshed out when he brings them to rehearsal to show us. Other times he just has the riff and he'll play it for a while and then we kind of jam it out and figure out what comes next; but he always comes up with the lyrics melody and chords. From there it's a toss up for all songs. Sometimes he has 95% of the idea, other times he only has 15% of the idea. It just depends on the song.

Osty: How has it been since you guys were the first unsigned band on the Cover of Rolling Stone Magazine in 2011, and how has it changed your lives since?

Sam: We've been lucky, but we've also worked really hard to try and sustain a career out of making music by doing a lot of touring and recording albums as fast as possible to sustain the career. A lot of reality TV show winners from like American Idol, The Voice, those sorts of shows don't make for a sustainable career. The fact that we've been able to keep such a stable and sustainable career and perform all around the world from Canada, The US, and the UK for people , get radio airplay, and still have a career - we're very lucky to have, but it's also something we worked very hard towards at establishing.

Osty: Do you have any advice for upcoming drummers & musicians ?

Sam: The best advice I can give is to listen to as much music as you possibly can and to try and figure out what the performer is playing, and then copy it. It's what I would do. Another thing is to focus on the basics of technique early on, because I didn't and I'm mostly self-taught, and it's something I wish i had focused more on, but was too excited to just start playing.

Osty: Thank you for your time Sam. Have a great show tonight!

Sam: Thanks a lot! It was a pleasure talking with you.

GORD DOWNIE & HIS SECRET PATH: A Halifax Gig Review

Note: This gig review was never published, but was for assignment with AlternativeNation in 2016. Original review written in 2016.

Nearly a decade ago, I was fortunate enough to be present at the final-ever full solo concert performance by Gord Downie, of The Tragically Hip, whom had then just released his LP, Secret Path, that October.

Secret Path, the project, LP, book, and film, were inspired by the story of 12-year-old CHanie Wenjack, whom died in 1966, after running away from a residential school.

The concert was special for many reasons; It was the only stop in Halifax for Gord, and was announced late within a very brief list of shows for his touring schedule. It was announced after the conclusion of the Hip's 2016 (and final) Canadian Tour, and after the Dec. 2015 announcement that Downie had terminal brain cancer, in September 2016.

The Rebecca Cohn show on Tuesday, November 29th, 2016, was announced only a mere 2 weeks before, on November 15th, 2016. Doors were at 7:30pm, show began at 8:00pm.

I ventured my way up to Halifax, via Maritime Bus, with a borrowed camera (by good friend and exceptional artist Alyson Oliver) in my backpack. I was lucky enough to have a media pass, for a review, that, for whatever reason, never materialized at the time. This is that review.

I arrived in Halifax around 2:45pm, and made my way to a family/friends' apartment residence on Barrington. The sky was overcast and cloudy, and I could feel how heavy this show, and its presence would be on those who attended. I quickly was ready for the concert. We grabbed a quick bite of sushi at a local restaurant in the city, and then I secured a ride from the apartment, to the Cohn, prior to showtime, at 7:15pm.

Once I arrived at the Rebecca Cohn Auditorium, I spoke to management, and advised I was there for Press Relations and to review the show. With trusty camera in hand, we were advised we could only shoot from the back of the auditorium, as seating was limited. This was fine by me, as this was my one and only time I was able to witness Gord and his power of capturing a room, so eloquently, and powerfully.

Prior to the gig starting, Gord's brother Mike spoke on behalf of the Secret Path project, as well as Ry Moran (Director, National Centre for Truth & Reconciliation), Natan Obed (President, Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami) and Doreen Bernard (member of the Sipekne'katik First Nation)to state the importance of the evening, and what Gord was doing for indigenous people all across Canada.

Gord swiftly, along with his all-star band of members, from the likes of Broken Social Scene, Barenaked Ladies, The Skydiggers, Do Make Say Think, commanded the room through the 10 tracks on the LP, starting with "The Stranger", flowing through "Swing Set", firing on all cylinders with "Seven Matches", "I Will Not Be Struck", and "Son", lifting the crowd to their knees with "Secret Path", "Don't Let This Touch You", and taking everyone's breath away - you could hear a pindrop, it was that silent, with "Haunt Them, Haunt Them, Haunt Them", "The Only Place to Be", and ending with the powerfully sung "Here, Here, and Here".

And like that, it was over. Gord Downie would subsequently pass away, leaving behind a lasting legacy of music that affected Canadians and the World, far and wide, the following year in October 2017.

The TRagically Hips' Gord Downie performing at The Rebecca Cohn Theatre, Halifax, November 2016. His final full concert performance.